

Participatory Action Research: A Tool for Enhancing Inclusive Teaching Practices Among Teachers in South African Full-Service Schools

SAGE Open
October-December 2020: 1–13
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DOI: 10.1177/2158244020963576
journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo


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Abstract

Previous studies conducted on the implementation of inclusive education in South African full-service schools showed that teachers lacked knowledge and expertise in inclusive teaching practices. Furthermore, in some international studies, it is recommended that, to enhance inclusive teaching, it was necessary to involve the teaching communities concerned, using their in-depth understanding of the problem at hand, to come up with emancipatory solutions that could assist in the design of effective teaching strategies to enhance inclusive teaching. Therefore, this study investigated the role of participatory action research (PAR) in enhancing teachers' inclusive teaching practices in full-service schools. This qualitative PAR study was conducted for 6 months by a research team comprising 12 teachers in a full-service school in the Johannesburg East District of South Africa. Data were collected through PAR stages of planning, observation, action, and reflection. To analyze data, during PAR, group interpretative meetings were held with coresearchers and, after PAR process, an inductive qualitative thematic content data analysis was done by the researcher. Among the findings from the study was that teachers' understandings of inclusive education were varied. Their conceptions about what it meant to be an inclusive teacher in a full-service school context were also vague. However, the study has found that through PAR participation teachers were able to share and develop own understandings of these concepts. Furthermore, the study identified a need for teachers in a full-service school to be reflective, critical, and innovative about their teaching practices to cater for diverse learner needs in the classroom, which are skills necessary for enhancing inclusive teaching and learning. The study has confirmed PAR as a viable change strategy of teaching toward inclusion.

Keywords

barriers to learning, full-service schools, inclusive practice, learners with diverse needs, reflective and innovative practitioners

Introduction

South Africa became a democracy in 1994 after the African National Congress Party, led by a Black majority, ended the apartheid era. This was the same year that the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994) was released, calling for education for all, regardless of learning disabilities; hence, South Africa's journey to inclusive education began.

In 2001, the Education White Paper 6 on special needs education (Department of Education [DoE], 2001) was introduced, as a measure to address schooling for children with barriers to learning. In it was outlined, as a major step toward inclusive education, that some ordinary schools would be converted into full-service schools where children with barriers to learning could be taught in inclusive classes together with ordinary learners. A follow-up policy on screening,

identification, assessment, and support, the SIAS policy (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2014), advocates major reforms by outlining how teachers are expected to teach learners with barriers to learning to make education accessible to all learners, regardless of background, disability, gender, or creed.

The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa therefore points to teachers as the primary resource and agents to achieve inclusive education. The expectation is that teaching staff should be well trained and have the

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skills and knowledge that support multilevel, effective classroom instruction and inclusive teaching strategies. However, according to De Jager (2011), and echoed by Walton and Lloyd (2012), 95.6% of teachers interviewed were either *never* or *seldom* trained on how to teach learners who experienced barriers to learning as most of them were trained as teachers prior to the implementation of inclusive education. De Jager's study showed that the teachers lacked support on how to deal with learners who experienced barriers. This was supported by other studies that also found that teacher training was inadequate in preparing teachers for inclusive teaching (Makoelle, 2012; Micanovic et al., 2017). Although it has been 25 years since South Africa became a democracy, and 18 years since the Education White Paper 6 on special needs education was released as the guiding document for implementation of inclusive education, schools still experience forms of exclusion on the basis of factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and learners' physical and intellectual abilities (Lemon, 2005; Ocampo, 2004). Schools in the poorer socioeconomic and low-cost areas remain predominantly Black and under-resourced, and frequently still have under-trained teachers who were mostly trained during the apartheid era under the inferior Bantu education. As a consequence of teachers not being well equipped for inclusive teaching, the research done on learners with barriers to learning and their experiences in inclusive schools shows that learners feel that they are insufficiently supported, and that their learning needs are not being met (Bansilal et al., 2010; Leseyane et al., 2018).

Therefore, the expectation of the South African education policy makers in regard to the SIAS policy (DBE, 2014) was that ongoing professional development and support for teachers would be administered by established district-based support teams. These teams would draw expertise from higher education institutions and local communities to target special schools and designated full-service schools. In practice, it remains a mammoth task for a teacher of an inclusive classroom to convert policy into practice (Engelbrecht et al., 2016).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to involve teachers in participatory action research (PAR) to explore how it could enhance inclusive teaching practices for diverse learners' needs in an inclusive classroom in South African full-service schools. This is because learners with diverse needs in an inclusive classroom setting include children requiring additional support, those with special needs, and those experiencing others forms of barriers to learning. Barriers to learning in South African schools are grouped into four broad categories, that is, systemic barriers, societal barriers, pedagogic barriers, and intrinsic barriers (DBE, 2014; Kubayi, 2010; Weeks & Erradu, 2013; Wium & Louw, 2015). To address diverse learner needs, teachers, including those in full-service schools, need to be skilful in facilitating teaching that is inclusive and supportive to all learners. Therefore, the following research question drove the enquiry:

Research Question: How can PAR enhance inclusive teaching skills of teachers in a South African full-service school context?

Problem Statement

Full-service schools that offer inclusive education to diverse learners were established as a result of the implementation of the 2001 Education White Paper 6 on special needs education (DoE, 2001). These schools were intended to provide education indiscriminately to all learners with or without barriers to learning. As a result, these schools were upgraded and resourced to become inclusive schools. The upgrading and resourcing required school personnel to be upskilled with information and resources that would enable them to operate in an inclusive school environment. There are about 715 full-service schools in South Africa. In the Johannesburg East District of Gauteng province, where the current study was conducted, there are only five full-service schools out of a total of 83 schools.

The government has published several policies to guide teachers in full-service schools and other categories on how to teach diverse learners (DBE, 2011, 2014). Although the policy documents attempt to explore ways in which teachers can differentiate the curriculum content (DBE, 2011), it is not known whether these policies are understood and applied effectively by teachers in all full-service schools. It is also not clear whether teachers understand how to implement the policy instructions following limited sessions of training in the area. This is evident as high failure rates are still experienced in many South African schools, including in full-service schools, where learners repeat grades year after year without much improvement (Grossen et al., 2017).

However, be that as it may, inclusive teaching and learning in South Africa is expected to be inclusive and learner-centered (Loreman, 2010; Makoelle, 2014). The government policy states that "all learners can learn, when given the right support" (DoE, 2001, p. 16). The policy requires teachers to understand and respond to students' different needs for "learning through creating multiple ways of curriculum presentation" (DoE, 2001, p. 16). Furthermore, there is a need for the ongoing assessment of educators in South Africa to establish structures and programs that support teachers on how to teach using an inclusive learner-centered approach. These programs should aim at training teachers in the use of inclusive practices (Makoelle, 2014; Walton, 2018), such as multilevel classroom instruction, cooperative learning, problem-solving, and the development of learners' strengths and competencies rather than focusing on their shortcomings.

On the contrary, Grossen et al. (2017) concur with Makoelle (2014) that there are many barriers to inclusion that have not been addressed in the system, for example, English as a medium of instruction being unfamiliar to both learners and teachers. This problem, coupled with that of bigger class sizes in most schools in the previously

disadvantaged neighborhoods, for instance, having more than 60 children per class, continues to present a challenge to inclusive teaching (Naude & Meier, 2019). Therefore, exploring tools for enhancing inclusive teaching practices among teachers in the South African full-service school context contributes to conceptual framework about teacher-driven approaches to enhancing inclusive teaching.

Literature Review

Inclusive Teaching and Learning

Internationally, Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011) developed the *Index for Inclusion*, which has become a widely accepted guiding blueprint for studies on inclusive schools. The index gives guidelines on idealistic inclusive teaching practices. It advocates that all learners be valued, and that the curriculum be adapted to suit the diverse learner needs in the classroom. The index has three dimensions, that is, creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive practices. The dimension on evolving inclusive practices clearly articulates what it means to teach inclusively. The following are regarded as most important characteristics of inclusive teaching: planning teaching with student learning in mind and teaching that is collaborative, respects diversity, considers student's voices, and considers assessment that addresses the needs of students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Conversely, Florian and Spratt (2015) propose three constituents for inclusive teaching. First, *understanding learning*—which presupposes that teachers' knowledge of the theory of learning is significant for learner support. Second, *understanding social justice*—meaning if teachers believe in principles of social justice, it enables them to depart from a premise that all their learners can succeed in learning; therefore, difficulties that their learners experience are the responsibility of teachers. Third, *collaboration*—which implies that inclusive teaching requires that teachers work collaboratively with others in turning their knowledge into action for learner support (Florian & Spratt, 2015).

In the South African context, whereas policies that provide guidance on how to respond to diversity in the classroom have been formulated (DBE, 2011, 2014), enabling support for teachers in the implementation of inclusive pedagogy has not been fully realized. Guideline documents attempt to address how teachers should differentiate the content when teaching; they outline how to make the teaching environment welcoming to all learners, provide multiple ways of presenting lessons, and vary assessment methods without disadvantaging any learner. However, these guidelines are broad and require that teachers be skilled enough, for example, that they would know how to adapt the guidelines for varying school contexts. These guidelines adopt a similar approach to that of the Universal Design for Learning's principles of teaching (Hall et al., 2012; Rodesiler & McGuire, 2015).

Action Research and Education in South Africa

Action research has been used as a tool to develop practices of inclusion in countries such as England (Ainscow et al., 2004). However, this methodology is still relatively new in the South African context, but it is gaining momentum as an alternative approach to equipping teachers for research into their practice to solve any professional problems they may experience or simply to improve their teaching (Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2009). For example, in one study conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand, action research was found to be helpful in enabling student teachers to teach inclusive classes using a practical, interactive model of teacher training that was action-research oriented (Walton & Lloyd, 2012). In this model, lecturers observe student teachers implement the knowledge that they have acquired in inclusive classrooms and then collaborate and share their experience.

Similarly, Makoelle and Van der Merwe (2014) conducted a collaborative action-research study exploring teaching strategies that could be appropriately applied in inclusive education in the South African school context. In the study, teachers were made to work collaboratively among themselves through interaction and sharing of ideas to develop and implement inclusive practices in their teaching. It was found that action research was instrumental to teachers of inclusive schools to reflect on their own teaching with a view to improving the use of self-developed strategies. Although this was found to be a practical way of empowering teachers to develop inclusive teaching strategies, the downside to the study was that the process posed challenges for teachers as they seemed unable to reflect critically on themselves and their practice, mainly because of their past teacher training and disadvantaged background. This poses a challenge for transitioning teaching toward inclusion because critical and collaborative reflections on one's teaching were found to be beneficial in fostering teachers' experiences of well-being and development (Wessels & Wood, 2019).

Action research is therefore becoming widely used as a research methodology in South Africa (Dymond et al., 2006; Makoelle & Van der Merwe, 2014; Ostmeier & Scarpa, 2012; Walton & Lloyd, 2012). However, in South Africa, at present most teachers in full-service schools and ordinary schools still do not know how to teach learners with diverse needs in an inclusive classroom. Therefore, as a result, full-service school teachers either have to rely on in-service training or expect the learners to fit in despite their barriers to learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). It is therefore reasonable to say that a challenge facing South African education transition to inclusive teaching and learning is that most teachers are less reflective, critical, and innovative about their practices (Engelbrecht et al., 2016) and this, coupled with other variables, has an impact on their ability to implement inclusive education fully.

Research Method

Research Design

PAR studies mostly involve issues that have a transformative agenda, which may include cases entailing change and improvement of teaching approaches by practitioners. These studies are also aimed at seeking to emancipate teachers and learners experiencing barriers to learning (Whitworth et al., 2014). The process of PAR is usually a rebuilding of broken and unjust social structures. It is for these reasons that PAR design was adopted in this study; it has the advantage as a social process that is very practical and allows colleagues to establish relationships as they share information through focus group discussions in a practical and collaborative manner (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). It is also flexible and encourages reflectivity while allowing creativity on the part of the practitioners.

Research Question

The following question became the guide for the study:

How can PAR enhance inclusive teaching practices of teachers in a South Africa full-service school context?

Therefore, the objective of the study was to determine how PAR could be used to enhance inclusive teaching practices of teachers in the South African full-service school context.

Site and Selection of Participants

Research site. A full-service primary school in Johannesburg East District was chosen as a research site—in a district with 83 government primary schools of which only five are full-service schools. The school was selected because it was founded in 1945 and had been in operation as a full-service school longer than the other full-service schools (since 2010). It was established that the school was more than 70 years old and had been converted into a full-service school in the past 9 years. Prior to becoming a full-service school, the teachers had been trained on inclusive teaching methodologies over a period of a year through attending classes on Saturdays at a local university. This was to prepare them for inclusive education. However, there had been no follow-up training in addition and some of the trained teachers had since left the school, while new untrained staff had joined the school, hence the need for this study.

Selection of participants. Twelve senior phase teacher participants out of a staff of 35 were selected using the purposive sampling technique. They included teachers aged between 25 and 60 years, with the majority being aged above 45 years, who were from the four main learning areas of mathematics, English, social sciences, and home languages. Apart

from these four learning areas being the main teaching areas, they were taught on an almost daily basis and therefore learners had more contact hours in these subjects compared with subjects like life skills and economics and management sciences. Purposive sampling is a technique that enabled the researchers to select teacher participants based on predetermined criteria, for example, those who taught a class of extremely diverse abilities in relation to the other teachers in their department (Vaughn et al., 1996). Hence, teachers of senior grades of fifth, sixth, and seventh, as well as representation from each of the four learning areas listed above, were selected. The teacher population comprised a staff of 35 teachers (all Black; only seven were male, and five were learning support teachers). Of these, 12 were selected to participate in the research.

Data Collection Process

PAR, which follows a spiral of characteristic self-reflective cycles, was applied. While using PAR, planning for the research was first conducted after which the intervention/action was carried out after pertinent observations had been made in various forms. The new interventional strategies were then implemented, and the cyclic process repeated, continuing until enough understanding of the problem and solution to the problem had been achieved (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Makoelle, 2014). Qualitative data were collected from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions during the PAR phases. The researcher (first author) held a brief workshop for teachers on PAR to enable them to understand the PAR process. Cohen et al. (2007) states that the PAR structure, which necessitates data collection through its characteristic four phases, should be applied.

Planning is the initial phase of PAR. During preplanning, background information on the school was collected through interviews with the school head, deputy heads, and some of the heads of departments. The planning phase was when the PAR research objectives were identified. It involved the researcher and research team identifying a problem, acknowledging it, and assessing the needs of the community (Ainscow et al., 2004; Ostmeyer & Scarpa, 2012). It was therefore a collaborative effort that involved a series of focus group meetings and brainstorming to define the aim of the research clearly (Anderson et al., 2015).

The observation phase looked at the current practice by determining what practices the teachers used. This helped determine teachers' knowledge of inclusive education. Teacher participants within departments and grades were paired up, had to observe each other's teaching, and record the inclusive teaching practices that they observed, using a semi-structured observation sheet. Observations have the advantage of leading to deeper understanding of the context than interviews alone because they provide knowledge of the context in which events occur (Patton, 1990). After

observations had been carried out, a meeting was held for the participants to talk about their experiences and their views were documented. This helped teachers to reflect on one another's teaching style. Separate focus group interviews with the teachers, using interview transcripts, were conducted to determine the challenges that hindered them from being inclusive practitioners.

The action phase involved putting the newly identified solutions and desired outcomes into practice. The researcher and research participants then collaboratively identified practical, inclusive teaching methods and strategies that were used to develop a tentative structure of what to implement. This phase therefore looked at inclusive teaching practices that were prevalent in full-service schools. The research participants documented their progress in their research journals. Regular interviews with members of the research group were conducted to ascertain their progress and offer support and reinforcement on implementing PAR where needed (Gill et al., 2008). In this phase, teacher participants implemented the agreed-upon teaching strategies from the group interpretative discussions.

The reflection phase involved the research participants reflecting on their actions, what had worked, and what needed improvement. There were also focus group sessions for reflection, during which the group reflected on the whole PAR cycle and came up with a group interpretation of the data gathered. Evaluating the outcome yielded realization of how well the research process had gone, but it also helped the research team to critique the process to improve it. After a review of all the observation and action phases, a better plan was put in place, considering the findings, hence a whole new cycle commenced. This process repeated itself until information reached theoretical saturation. The reflections were guided by set questions aimed at determining the extent to which PAR had effected change in teacher practices.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed at two stages: First, at PAR level with teacher participants and, second, by the researcher after the conclusion of PAR. The analysis with teachers was intended to determine which of the objectives of the project had been achieved and whether there had been a change in terms of knowledge and practice about inclusive teaching practices. The aim of the researcher's analysis was to determine the contribution of action-research study to new knowledge about processes of developing inclusive teaching practice by teachers.

Group interpretative analysis with teachers. After each stage of PAR, the analysis of data took the form of group interpretative meetings with participants to make sense of collected data during all four PAR stages. This level of analysis was aimed at determining what the project had achieved in

terms of knowledge about, and the development of, inclusive teaching practices. The analysis was driven by questions derived from conversations and discussions by the research team. These are some of the guiding questions: What is our understanding of inclusive teaching (before and then)? How inclusive are our teaching practices and how can we develop our teaching practices to make them more inclusive? How has action research been helpful in improving our perspectives and practices on inclusive teaching and learning? Thereafter, meanings and patterns were coalesced to answer these questions so that the research teams could reach conclusions.

Analysis by the researcher. After PAR, all sets of data from the study were analyzed by the researcher. Inductive thematic qualitative data analysis of minutes of group interpretative meetings, transcripts of individual interviews, focus group interviews, and research team journals was applied. Analysis took place in the following stages:

Reading of data: The researcher read and reread each set of data to get a holistic understanding of the different sets of data. Essential codes were then highlighted in each set of data.

Development of categories: The highlighted codes were then sorted into categories that had descriptors for similar/dissimilar information that pointed toward emerging issues in the data (Cohen et al., 2007).

Triangulation: A spreadsheet was developed to group correlated and related messages to triangulate data from different data sets.

Deriving patterns and meanings: Finally, the categories that had correlations and related messages were grouped into coherent themes from different sets of data.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher (first author) during the study was that of coresearcher. The researcher was mindful of the power relations between her as the researcher and the teachers; therefore, it was important from the beginning of PAR to agree that different roles would be rotated among the research team members to deal with this dilemma. At the beginning of PAR, teachers felt that it would be useful if the researcher could facilitate the beginning stages of PAR until they were certain about their roles.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The research procedures were systematic and rigorous. The research data were validated through a member checking process. The participants were also trained on action research to enhance the integrity and robustness of the action-research process. Triangulation of different sets of data was done to validate the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Research protocol procedures were followed after ethics clearance had been given beforehand. All the research participants gave consent for participation, participated on a voluntary basis, and were kept anonymous. Sampling of participants was done equitably to avoid bias, and a copy of the research data was verified by participants (Cohen et al., 2007). The research findings were shared by the research participants upon completion of the study.

Findings

The findings were arrived at using both group interpretative analysis and the main researcher's meta-analysis of all the data collected at the various stages of PAR. The findings were organized in accordance with the objectives set in each of the PAR phases and guided by the theoretical perspectives on development of inclusive practices in the literature. In this case, the index of inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) and Florian and Spratt's (2015) three constituents of inclusive teaching became the guiding compass for interpretation of findings. The following themes were identified through data analysis.

How PAR Revealed Teachers' Knowledge of Inclusive Teaching

PAR as Enabler for the Teacher Researchers to Deepen Their Understanding of Full-Service School Contexts

The study seems to point out that PAR allows teacher researchers a deeper and clearer understanding of their context, which is important for inclusive teaching. For instance, engaging with the context enabled the research team to know more about the learners through record-keeping and gave them a chance to interact with the learning support. This was evident from one of the teacher participant's observation when she noted,

I am supposed to show records of what I have done to support the learners especially if they fail. I must prove that I did some interventions, and this helps me keep records for proof of my interventions. For example, I found out that one of my learners has epilepsy, and we have no school nurse, and no support, but I know the child is in the right school with my support. Now I can help the child because I am better informed.

PAR enabled the research team to uncover the school's situation to generate solutions for challenges such as class sizes of 50 to 65 learners, as well as the limited support that the teachers received while supporting 1,500 learners in their school with only five learning support teachers. This was confirmed by one of the teacher participant's sentiments:

I currently have 21 out of the 65 children in my class who are repeaters. Some are not on IEPs, and I am only allowed by the department to fail 2 or 3. I do not get support for my class, and as a full-service school, this research has been an eye opener for me.

Another one noted,

There are problems when it comes to supporting the learners with barriers to learning. There is a gap, and we no longer get professional support that we used to get. We do not get support on how to identify them. We as teachers have become the teacher, support, social worker, because government support is not readily available. The teacher assistants that used to come in to help us no longer come.

While getting to know the context took a long time, it resulted in the identification of challenges that full-service schools experience. These included challenges such as teachers not having resources for learners with diverse needs, for example, access to dictaphones for recording their work or typing gadgets for learners with motor difficulties, as one teacher noted:

Yes, I try to create a good environment for learning although not as much as I wish because the class is cluttered and crowded with no space and no learning aids. It is not easy with so many children to help them individually, so I use visuals and diagrams to teach, and put them in groups to assist each other.

The research team experienced the challenge of overcrowding in classes, which made teachers less excited about their teaching. Such teaching conditions made the teachers work harder, especially those who did not have the necessary skills to teach in an inclusive environment, as was noted earlier and as expected from the index for inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

PAR Enabled Both the Researcher and Participants to Define Inclusive Teaching in the Full-Service School Context

PAR allowed the research team to define the characteristics of inclusive teaching clearly in the context of a full-service school. Among these characteristics identified was including every learner—with or without barriers to learning; hence, it requires infrastructure change as well as change in policy and practice. This was defined by the research team and captured by the sentiments of a teacher:

Inclusive education means assisting learners with different types of barriers to learning, this means that we then have to teach them according to their abilities.

PAR also enabled the research team to clarify different roles of those involved in support of diverse learners. For example, one teacher wanted to know the difference between

the role of a remedial teacher and a learner support educator (LSE). This can be seen in the statements made by two teachers regarding learning support:

We have LSE to support teachers, and if the learner needs extensive support, we have a referral system. When we attend cluster meetings, we realise that the ordinary schools do not have any idea of what referral system is. We are guided by the government policy for referral.

We make our curriculum flexible and we have LSE with whom we plan together especially in Languages and Maths, even though we do not have enough LSE, and the LSE also help our learners with consolidation of the concepts that we have taught.

It therefore became evident that, apart from having very few LSEs, the school did not have teacher assistants, despite the large class sizes of 55 to 65 learners per class. It was therefore important to clarify the role of teaching assistants compared with that of LSEs. Dreyer (2013) lists the functions of an LSE as compiling resource files, helping the teachers with programs and differentiation, consulting with the class teacher and parents, giving input at institutional level support meetings, assuming responsibility for diagnostic testing of learners' scholastic ability, and managing referrals to special schools. The teacher assistant, on the contrary, gets directives from the teacher in charge on what to do in an assistive role.

How PAR Conveyed Inclusive Teaching Practices Prevalent in Full-Service Schools

PAR Brought About Change That Led to Desired Outcomes in Transformative Ways

PAR allowed the research team to improve their research skills, enabling them to research their own practice with the aim of improving it. Teachers developed skills of being critical, innovative, and reflective about their own teaching practice (Florian & Spratt, 2015). For example, teachers reported that they did more reflection on ways of improving their teaching continually. One participant noted,

The observation and research help me understand the profiles of learners. The research helped me to make observations and be a researcher.

On the contrary, PAR increased the ability of the research team to take the initiative and be proactive regarding members' own practice, which is crucial for inclusive teaching. This is supported by this statement from one of the participants:

At first, I was wondering why you were asking us to be involved and taking a lead. I did not understand action research.

So, I thought you were evaluating our knowledge asking us question instead of doing a presentation and giving us information (he laughs). Anyway, in the end, it was a good thing, it allowed us to transition from being told what to do to doing things ourselves.

PAR Allowed Participants Choice and Flexibility While Seeking Sustainable Change

Initially, the PAR process allowed the participants to learn from their peers through focus group meetings, class observations of each other in practice, and during their reflective group discussions. PAR also allowed flexibility for teachers when making pedagogical choices and adapting these to be inclusive in response to diversity (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

I benefited, and I think I would like more workshops (focus group discussion) to help me understand how to go about making right choices for my teaching approach and methods. We have subject meetings for language teachers and a district coach, but it is not the same, and it is not enough. We need more free discussions to learn from each other.

The study has indicated that solutions developed through PAR were more practical and authentic as everybody concerned can easily relate to these in their context. The following statement supports this:

It refreshed our knowledge. I have learned how to treat learners better. I am also learning to manage the class better by moving around and reducing bullying. I don't always need to be given info on how what to do because I can think now.

PAR Enhanced Creativity and Innovation in Teachers of Full-Service Schools

During the action phase, PAR allowed the participants to experiment and implement their newly acquired knowledge to improve their inclusive teaching. This allowed them to find out what worked for them and what needed to change, hence, turning knowledge into practice (Florian & Spratt, 2015). For example, when asked about the kind of classroom environment that they were creating to make all learners welcome, one teacher responded,

I tried to take them to the library/outside for a reading lesson and they liked the change. I also placed more pictures and charts in the classroom for the learners so that it looked warm for the learners.

Another one mentioned,

I feel more creative now, I am now grouping the learners so that they can work well together and help each other, and I move around from one group to the other identifying the ones that are struggling by talking to the groups.

However, one hindrance to creativity was seen to be lack of resources and support. The barriers that presented a challenge to inclusive teaching included broken computers, theft, a limited number of books and charts, and lack of smart technology. However, one participant seemed optimistic about being creative. This extract attests to this:

Even if the classroom is small, being able to improvise and take them out to do group work and activities, they enjoy activities and being practical.

How PAR Enhanced Inclusive Teaching Practices in a Full-Service School

PAR Allowed for Sharing of Expertise and Information, Leading to Teamwork and Collaboration Among the Teachers

It is evident from the study that PAR helped both the researcher and practitioners in a full-service school context to build communities of practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) that worked together in ways that aimed at improving their teaching practices significantly by observing each other, as one narrated,

My colleague teaches essay writing better than I do, so I asked her to take both classes for essays. What I used to teach it in one lesson, she took a week, with a whole lesson dedicated only to the introduction. She told the children to plan the introduction using who, when, where and introduce properly. I would have rushed. She then took a whole lesson to teach the body. They discussed what happened for a whole lesson and the last lesson they learn to reflect and write a conclusion by looking at the lessons they learnt from what had happened. The children are now enjoying writing essays, yet before they struggled to write.

The PAR process allowed interaction with participants, during the focus group meetings as well as during observation, when they had to pair up and observe each other. This communication encouraged the sharing of expertise between colleagues and hence provided a platform for interaction and better inclusive practice, as seen in this example:

. . . I teach grade 6, but had learners who struggle, and I sent them to a grade 4 teacher to help them with sounds, and it really worked. I also invited a teacher who is good with creative writing to teach my learners for one lesson and their essays really improved. Observing other teachers or asking for help motivates and gives a good example.

Through PAR, teacher participants were paired up to observe each other. This was the beginning of collaboration and teamwork. Over time, the participants were sharing information within departments while supporting and learning from each other. Once the teachers started collaborating, they were able to determine which group work strategies

functioned better. For example, one teacher said ability grouping:

With group work, I used to group them according to their ability, but now I have learnt to let the gifted ones help those who were struggling instead of me helping them all the time because it takes a lot of my time.

As a result, teachers were able to learn from one another on group work methods. This was indicative of the significance of collaboration in enhancing inclusive teaching. In another example, one teacher explained how she learned from a colleague to plan time and content of essay writing lesson:

For example, my colleague taught essay writing better than I do, so I asked her to take both classes for essays. While I used to teach it in one lesson, she took a whole lesson to teach only the introduction. She told the children to plan the introduction using; who, when, where and introduce properly. I would have rushed. She then took a whole lesson to teach the body. They discussed what happened for a whole lesson and the last lesson they learn to reflect and write a conclusion by looking at the lessons they learnt from what had happened. The children are now very enjoying writing essays, yet before they struggled.

There was also collaboration in handing over student information (which is critical for teaching support) from one grade to the next at the end of the academic year, so that the next teacher got the learners' records and learner profiles to plan their teaching effectively, as one teacher participant reported,

I get information from their previous teacher and parents. This information enables me to prepare for their teaching and learning appropriately and adequately.

It can therefore be said that, before PAR, teachers previously worked on their own, but as a result of action research, they have learned to co-teach, collaborate, and learn from one another. This is echoed by Wessels and Wood (2019) who contend that when teachers work collaboratively in PAR their well-being is also enhanced.

PAR Allowed for Ongoing Self-Critical Reflection by the Teachers

According to Booth and Ainscow (2011), being reflective is one of the important characteristics of inclusive teaching. During the reflection phase of the current study, the PAR process allowed the teacher participants to reflect on their work in terms of what was working and what was not, and, if not, how they could make it work better. One participant reflected on the process:

I have learned to think and reflect about my teaching. For example, reflecting about my reading lesson I realised that in

Table 1. Showing How Teachers' Practice Transformed With Participatory Action Research.

Teacher practices before participatory action research	Teacher practices after participatory action research
Ability grouping was central to group work by learners	Grouping was done more strategically according to needs of learners
The teacher asked yes/no questions with less teacher–learner interaction	Teachers asked questions enabling better expression with more teacher–learner interaction
Worked on their own with less collaboration and team teaching	Collaboration increased and teachers worked more as a team (Dreyer, 2013)
Teacher movement focused less on principle of individualization and differentiation	Teacher applied the principle of differentiation more consistently (Hattie, 2002)
The teacher's pedagogical methods were content based	Teacher learned to use varying teaching methods to address diverse learners' needs
Students' past learning experiences not used sufficiently to address future learning engagements	Past learning experiences recorded to provide a comprehensive portfolio of progress and support for learners
Teaching environment not adapted sufficiently to respond to diversity of learners	Teaching environment changed to address learner's diversity (Loreman, 2010)
Assessment approaches rigid and not tailored to address learner needs	Varied assessment methods applied to respond to the individual needs of learners
One-on-one remediation preferred, which assumed the learner had a learning deficit	Varied methods of support applied with regard to pedagogy and learning

my teaching, I had not been challenging my learners to express themselves. Most of them were only comfortable with yes/no answers or one-word answers but were not exposed to explaining their answers. This week, I asked them questions that required them to think and explain, and they found it hard to answer, most of them preferring to keep quiet, so it is something that I would like to try and build on them. As long as they can speak in sentences. They struggle to express themselves . . . This week, I interacted, we read a paragraph, then we stop, and we talk about it . . . I would now like to try it with listening, I want them to listen and give me the sequence of events to improve their listening skills.

The indication is that being reflective may lead to teachers improving their teaching practice because they may identify their teaching weaknesses and strengths to improve.

PAR Also Allowed the Teachers to Reflect on Their Involvement in the PAR Process Itself

The study has confirmed that, although it is sometimes difficult to sustain teacher involvement in PAR, it was a starting point of building a culture of working together. The following statement by an Learner Support Teacher (LST) supports this:

While two of the teachers had to drop out of this research because of their commitment with co-curriculum activities. I am happy that we can now plan and do things together.

The study has proved that PAR is viable when teachers want to change or improve their teaching. There were a lot of noticeable changes and professional growth among teachers, for example, on reflecting, one of the teachers indicated how her administrative skills have improved:

I can now keep learner records better. This helped me to be a better classroom manager. I can now even share my experience with other teachers.

Although the study has indicated that PAR was a good teacher change strategy toward inclusive teaching in full-service schools, sustaining PAR beyond the research period was not a one-off process. It would require a favorable, supportive school environment on the part of school leadership, as well as positive attitudes from teachers. Teachers were skeptical about whether they can sustain working through PAR. Table 1 below summarizes the practices teachers thought were transformed by participating in PAR.

Discussion of Findings

How PAR Revealed Teachers' Knowledge of Inclusive Teaching

PAR as an enabler for the teacher researchers to deepen their understanding of the full-service school context. Literature points out that PAR creates an effective avenue whereby teachers' understanding of the school context is enhanced, and the understanding then helps them to design support materials for diverse learners in inclusive schools (Anderson et al., 2015; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Makoelle, 2014). This study has shown that PAR was instrumental in creating a framework for the understanding of context by teachers in full-service schools in South Africa. It allowed teachers to do a proper situation analysis in terms of identifying barriers to inclusive education, teaching, and learning. Their understanding of context would then give them insight into their planning, so that they could develop an appropriate support approach for all learners (Lehtomaki et al., 2014; Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018). It can therefore be concluded that PAR is

useful for enhancing teachers' understanding of the school situational context, which is important for inclusive teaching in full-service schools.

PAR enabled both the researcher and participants to define inclusive teaching in the full-service school context. According to Dyson and Millward (2000), inclusion is an elusive concept, which is understood differently in different contexts. Hence, Makoelle (2014) avers that defining inclusive teaching is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusion. Fourie (2017) has also found that the roles of stakeholders have to be clarified in the quest to develop a support structure in an inclusive school. The study has illustrated that PAR created a condition for clarification of concepts and roles in a full-service school and that this was significant for inclusive teaching to thrive as PAR gave the participants time to understand the context and the problem in depth (McIntyre, 2006). Moreover, PAR enabled teachers to engage in continuous dialogue on learning (Anderson et al., 2015; Dymond et al., 2006; Ostmeier & Scarpa, 2012), which helped them agree on a definition of inclusive teaching. Teachers' understanding of inclusion is not merely important, but also key and the heart to the success of inclusion (Lindsay, 2007; Loreman, 2010; Oyler, 2011). Therefore, teachers need to have knowledge of inclusion and an understanding of the diverse needs of learners, so that they can plan their teaching accordingly as it is the role of the teacher to identify and consider individual differences in all learners (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Knowing the theory behind how learning takes place, turning knowledge into action, and believing that you can teach all children (Florian & Spratt, 2015) will lead to more success in inclusive teaching.

How PAR Conveyed Inclusive Teaching Practices Prevalent in Full-Service Schools

PAR brought about change that led to desired outcomes in transformative ways. According to Ainscow (2005) and Anderson et al. (2015), the desired outcome for the implementation of inclusive education is influenced by the attitude of those who must ensure its success, in this case the teachers. However, teachers' attitudes to change could be a barrier. Studies also show that teachers are generally found to have more favorable attitudes to including children with physical and sensory impairments than those with learning difficulties (Lindsay, 2007). The attitudes of teachers are likely to change if they are involved in the development of local theories about inclusive teaching (Makoelle, 2014), rather than being coerced into what they do. Whitworth et al. (2014) wrote that action research is "inherently transformative, seeking to investigate practice from within, and bring necessary change" (p. 252). It is evident that PAR was an instrumental change mechanism toward inclusive teaching. This finding concurs with the work of Makoelle and Van der Merwe (2014) on PAR and the development of inclusive teaching practices. It

can, therefore, be said that PAR powerfully transformed the research participants into lifelong reflective researchers, hence making them part of the decision-making process (Anderson et al., 2015).

PAR allowed participants choice and flexibility while seeking sustainable change. The study seems to suggest that PAR enhanced teachers' abilities to make a pedagogical choice that promoted inclusive teaching. According to Bekker (2015), teachers' pedagogical choices are pivotal in enhancing their inclusive practices. It is evident that when teachers work together, the chances of making relevant and appropriate pedagogical choices increase. There was hence significant professional growth and development in the teacher participants because of this study (Anderson et al., 2015; Dymond et al., 2006; Ostmeier & Scarpa, 2012; Wessels & Wood, 2019).

PAR enhanced creativity and innovation in teachers of full-service schools. According to Ainscow (2005), most of the solutions to the barriers to inclusion are already available in schools among teachers. It is therefore important to create an environment where teachers could be creative and innovative about inclusive teaching. This study has demonstrated that PAR created such platforms for teachers to take the initiative and try new approaches in enhancing inclusive teaching. The layered curriculum advocates that teachers should start their lesson planning by first diagnosing their learners to establish their learning styles (visual/auditory/tactile) or whether they are the plain old reluctant learners (Nunley, 2006). This was also enhanced by PAR, enabling teachers to understand learner profiles and their backgrounds and hence be creative in the ways they assist them to suit individual learner needs (Florian & Spratt, 2015).

How PAR Enhanced Inclusive Teaching Practices in a Full-Service School

PAR allowed for sharing and collaboration among teachers. Research has shown (Ainscow et al., 2004) that developing communities of practice creates a platform for teachers to work together on the development of inclusive teaching practices. It is evident from the study that PAR enhanced the ability of teachers to research their own teaching practices as they worked in teams. The study indicated that when they worked as a team, teachers were able to identify the barriers that they caused to inclusion, teaching, and learning (Ainscow et al., 2004; Lehtomaki et al., 2014). In this study, teacher learning through co-teaching was introduced by PAR and was aimed at developing better understanding of the practices that could help overcome barriers to pupil participation in learning and introduce discussions on how such practices could be developed and sustained in schools (Howes et al., 2005). It was found that better teacher working relationships enhanced understanding of how to teach in an inclusive class setup.

Wessels and Wood's (2019) participatory research with teachers on fostering their experiences of well-being revealed that trusted communication brought about good collaborative reflection. Collaboration has been found to be important for enhancing inclusive practice in schools. The study has confirmed that PAR provided an opportunity for teachers to collaborate, hence enhancing their conceptions about inclusive teaching. The focus groups became a place of meeting and sharing, hence the birthing of collaborative teams that would see teachers working together (Ainscow et al., 2004; Lehtomaki et al., 2014). Collaboration later became one of the key pillars to the solution of finding better inclusive teaching practices in full-service schools using PAR.

PAR allowed for ongoing self-critical reflections by the teachers. According to Ainscow et al. (2004), the ability of teachers to be self-critical and reflective about their own teaching is crucial for inclusive teaching. As PAR methodology takes long to complete (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), it allows teachers time to reflect on their practice and come up with workable lasting solutions, enabling them to solve problems experienced in inclusive classroom teaching. PAR enabled the researchers to identify possible future problems in their teaching and gave them knowledge on how to come up with practical and creative solutions that worked for them. Reflection was a powerful tool that enabled the teachers to assess their practice and collaborate with their colleagues in finding flexible solutions. PAR, therefore, developed teachers who were self-critical and reflected on their teaching and teachers who came up with creative and innovative ideas for teaching diverse learners in inclusive classes.

Conclusion

Although the study could not be conclusive about the role of PAR in equipping teachers for inclusive teaching in full-service schools, as these schools are evolving and being developed on a continuous basis, it makes important contributions to the enhancement of inclusive teaching in full-service schools. Although, the study serves as a base for further research and discussions about the enhancement of inclusive teaching in full-service schools. It is recommended that a review of the study be done in 2 to 3 years to find out whether the good inclusive teaching practices acquired by the teachers in the PAR process are sustained. It is important to acknowledge that the study took place in only one full-service school and the findings might not be applicable to other school contexts.

However, the study established that PAR is a strong tool that can be used to enhance inclusive teaching for teachers of full-service schools, and this was confirmed by the teacher participants. It enabled the teacher researchers to deepen their understanding of the full-service school context, define inclusive teaching in the full-service school context, establish

teacher working relationships, define inclusive teaching in the full-service school context, and have choice and flexibility while seeking sustainable change. Thus, PAR enhanced creativity and innovation in teachers in full-service schools. It is also important to note that, in the end, the teacher researchers became sharers of knowledge and collaborators, ongoing self-critical reflectors on their practice, and experienced unquestionable growth, making PAR a powerful tool for teacher transformation for inclusive teaching.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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